



NEWSLETTER

No. 82

SPRING 2016

www.dacorumheritage.org.uk

THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 'BATTLE OF BERKHAMSTED COMMON'

Four generations of Berkhamstedians have chuckled over the story of Augustus John Smith's fight to save Berkhamsted Common from enclosure in 1866. It was really no laughing matter; the rights of the commoners had been flouted, and only a man of great bravery and wealth would have thought of hiring London labourers to smash down the iron railings.



Augustus Smith was ever a doughty fighter, and his part in the 'Battle of Berkhamsted Common' has tended to over-shadow his other good works for Berkhamsted.

From his home, Ashlyns Hall, where he was born in 1804, Augustus Smith pulled many of the strings which reawakened the town in the reign of William IV and in early Victorian times. He campaigned to put our educational institutions in good order, notably Berkhamsted School, of which he was described as the re-founder.

Besides helping the children of the more well to do residents, he championed a scheme, which led to the establishment of a good parish school for poorer children. He wrote:

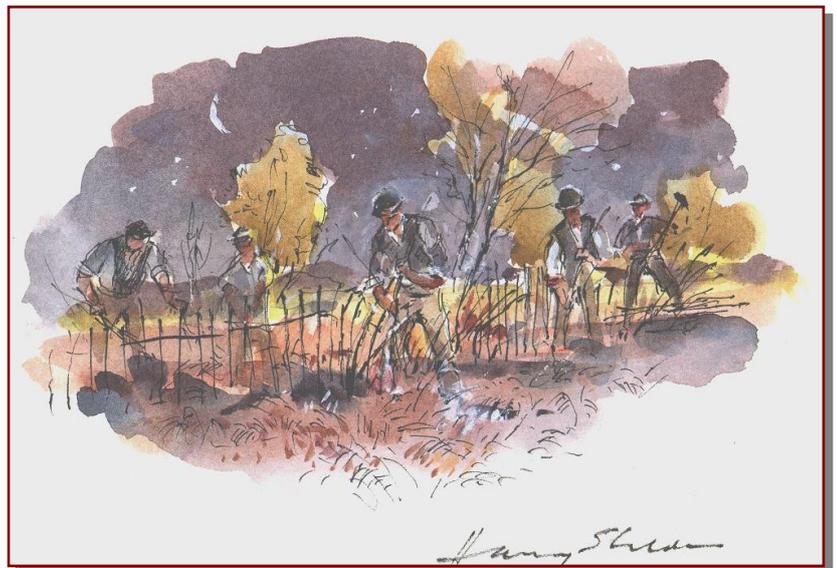
When I found youths, the progeny of hereditary paupers, simply through being taught to read, write and cypher, readily obtain in London

apprenticeships in various trades, I felt the true or at least the main clue was discovered as to raising their education.

Augustus Smith did not limit his public work to Berkhamsted. In 1834 he acquired the Scilly Islands and lived there from 1853 until his death in 1872. Instead of absentee landlords, the Scillonians had a resident deeply interested in their affairs. He built schools, making education compulsory when compulsion was still unknown on the mainland, and raised the islanders' standard of living, sometimes using methods which evoked criticism and indeed hatred.

Elected Member of Parliament for Truro in 1857, Augustus Smith attracted much attention every year by asserting the rights of the public against the claim of the Crown and the Duchy of Cornwall to own the foreshore of our sea coasts.

It was this desire to protect public rights, which impelled him to support the townspeople when Lord Brownlow was so ill-advised as to enclose Berkhamsted Common in 1866. He had previously tried without success to dissuade Lord Brownlow from interfering with ancient rights. Tall iron fences were erected, excluding commoners from the waste.



Text: from 'A Short History of Berkhamsted' by

Percy Birtchnell, 1st edition published 1960. **Photos:** Left: Augustus Smith MP. Right: Watercolour 'Pulling up Lord Brownlow's Railings at Ashridge' by Harry Sheldon, Berkhamsted Town Council Collection, cared for by DHT.

THE DACORUM HERITAGE TRUST LTD.

Registered Office: **The Museum Store, Clarence Road, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 3YL.**

Tel. No. **01442 879525** (answer phone). Or email collectionsmanager@dacorumheritage.org.uk

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Augustus Smith took drastic action. He hastily recruited a miniature army of Cockney "toughs" and Irish labourers and chartered a special train to convey them from Euston to Tring in the dead of night.

One hundred and twenty men, shouldering crowbars and other implements, marched two by two into the moonlight. Within an hour they reached the first of the 5-ft. high iron fences, made and erected by the Berkhamsted firm of iron-founders, Messrs. Wood and Son, beside the Ringshall road. This obstruction, and another long fence nearly a mile and a half away from the old rifle range to Frithsden Beeches, was thrown down before daylight. The joints of the railings were loosened by hammers and chisels; crowbars did the rest.

Inhabitants of Berkhamsted and neighbouring villages flocked to the scene. To quote a newspaper report:

'The news spread, and the inhabitants of the adjacent village and district flocked upon the scene. In carriages, gigs, dogcarts, and on foot, gentry, shopkeepers, husbandmen, women and children, all once tested the reality of what they saw by strolling over and spreading on the common and taking away morsels of gorse to prove, as they said, the place was their own again.'

Buckingham Advertiser, Saturday 10th March 1866.

The cost of the three miles of iron railings is said to have been more than £1,000 and that of its removal must have been considerable.

While Berkhamsted folk celebrated the reopening of the Common, Lord Brownlow instituted legal proceedings against Augustus Smith. This defender of ancient rights won the case and the plaudits of the Press, and it is pleasant to add that ill-feeling between Lord Brownlow and the townspeople was short-lived. The owner of Ashridge and his advisers genuinely thought they were acting in the best interests of the district, and had previously made what a number of townspeople considered the very satisfactory offer of a recreation ground, stretching from Mill Street to Billet Lane between the Bulbourne and the railway, in lieu of common rights.

WWI – 100 YEARS ON

As the war progresses the local tribunals were hearing more and more appeals for exemptions. Local businesses were struggling to find men to replace the former employees that were now serving. Many of the men that appealed were killed in action or died of wounds before the end of 1917. Here are a few of the fallen that were refused appeals or were granted a few months grace and later joined the Army, the following accounts appeared in the Gazette.

Gazette dated Saturday 25th March 1916 - INDISPENSABLE PRINTER

Mr. J. Brackett applied for the total exemption for Bertie Walter Parkins, letter press printer, age 22, married, Union-street, Hemel Hempstead. Mr. Brackett said Parkins was indispensable. Originally he had two men but the other had joined the Army. Parkins was to him as though he were his partner.

The Chairman asked if a woman could not do the work Parkins was doing, and Mr. Brackett replied in the negative. Have you tried to get another man? Yes, but it is long experience that enables him (Parkins) to do what I am unable to get anyone else to do. The Military Representative (to Parkins): You are willing to go? I think I should be better serving my master. The Chairman: Three months exemption, and there can be a further appeal then if necessary.

Pte. Bertie Walter Parkins, of 8th Beds Regiment, died of wounds in France on 26th June 1917. Husband of Alice.

A CLAIM DISMISSED

The case of Alfred Henry Bass, aged 24, of Cotterells, stock-keeper, in the employ of John Dickinson and Co. Ltd., had been adjourned twice for his attendance but he failed to put in an appearance, although specially warned to do so on the last occasion. The Tribunal now intimated that they dismissed his claim but that it was open to him to appeal.

Pte. Alfred Henry Bass, of 6th Northants Regiment, was killed in action on 17th February 1917.

Gazette dated Saturday 1st April 1916 - THE RENT WANTED

William Arthur Barnes, hairdresser, Marlowes, applied for three months' exemption. He said that his landlord claimed rent until Midsummer, and he could not meet this from his Army pay. Answering Mr. Smeathman the applicant said that he would have gone into the Army next week, but could not see how he could pay the rent. He had given notice to the landlord. Mr. Marnham said that he assented to extra time. The landlord was responsible for the man not serving. Exemption was granted for three months.

Pte. William Arthur Barnes, 2nd Suffolk Regiment, was killed in action in France on 11th April 1917, which was his 25th birthday.

Photos: Hemel Hempstead War Memorial, Boxmoor unveiled 26th June 1921 by Lt. Col. Lovell Smeathman.



TALKING NEW TOWNS PROJECT ANIMATION

Talking New Towns is an online oral history project, which captured tales of the emergence of Hertfordshire's new towns. With support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Stevenage Museum is working in partnership with the Dacorum Heritage Trust and the Welwyn and Hatfield Museum Service to create an online learning resource of photographs, film, and documents to animate oral



TALKING NEW TOWNS ANIMATION

history excerpts that shares the post-war history of the developments of Stevenage, Hemel Hempstead, Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City new towns.

The final part of our involvement in this project is the launch of a beautiful animation by Darren Wall from Planet Jump, based on interviews taken during the project. Look out for our animation coming soon! Keep checking the project website www.talkingnewtowns.org.uk

2018 EXHIBITION – ‘CELEBRATION OF PEACE IN DACORUM’

We hope, with a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, to successfully commemorate the 100 years since the end of the Great War. An exhibition would concentrate on the end of the First World War, the cease fire of November 1918 and the

subsequent celebrations of peace throughout Dacorum.

Alongside the exhibition we will gather information about local people and their stories. Host exciting art workshops using WWI as inspiration. We plan to create a unique collaborative art installation to highlight the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28th June 1919.

We would love to hear your thoughts on our project, please get in touch with any suggestions, comments or family history, which you would like to contribute to our



exhibition. Please email us on the project's dedicated email address – ww1@dacorumheritage.org.uk

To help to demonstrate to the HLF that there is public interest in an exhibition, please visit our website and submit your reply to the question “Would you attend an exhibition on this subject?” Please pass this onto your friends, the more responses we receive the stronger our application www.dacorumheritage.org.uk/dht-news/2018-exhibition

Nina Glencross, Collections Manager

Photo: Private Christopher Cox VC - a triumphant return to Kings Langley. From the David Spain Collection, cared for by DHT.

CROWDS FLOCK TO TRING



People flocked to the High Street in Tring, last October, to witness a very unusual event.

As part of the 'Tring 700' celebrations to commemorate Edward II granting a Market Charter to Tring, Alderman Derek Townsend exercised one of the privileges as a Freeman of the Borough of Dacorum; he has the right to drive a flock of sheep through the town.

The Apple Fayre procession started from the Kings Arms in King Street and continued to the Parish Church.

Derek is wearing a traditional smock and carries a wooden shepherds crook, with him in the procession was, an assistant shepherd (far left), farmer Keith Slade (carrying the green bucket), the owner of the flock, and David Metcalfe as the traditional character of the Green Man.

Over many year's Derek has served the local community as a Tring Town, Dacorum and County councillor, he also holds the ceremonial post of Deputy Lieutenant of Hertfordshire.

Photo: Public domain.

CURATOR'S CORNER

NEW 1970s Themed Reminiscence Box. Reminiscence is the act of recalling past experiences, and we have a fantastic box full of genuine objects from the 1970s to help you recapture those distant days when life was lived for real not online.

The loan box includes vinyl records to platform shoes, we are sure that something in this box will take you back in time!

This service is available to community groups of people of all ages. Boxes can be borrowed for up to one month for just £10 (with a £50 refundable deposit). We are currently trialling a delivery option for schools within the Dacorum area; this is an additional cost of £5 per loan. If you would like to use one of our loan boxes contact Nina or Sophie 01442 879 525 or email info@dacorumheritage.org.uk

Berkhamsted Castle. To commemorate the 800th anniversary of the siege of Berkhamsted Castle, the Medieval Siege Society will be holding events at the castle during the weekend of 11th and 12th June. There will be a trebuchet, archery demonstrations and living history in the theme of the 1216 siege of the castle. See local press or the link for more details:

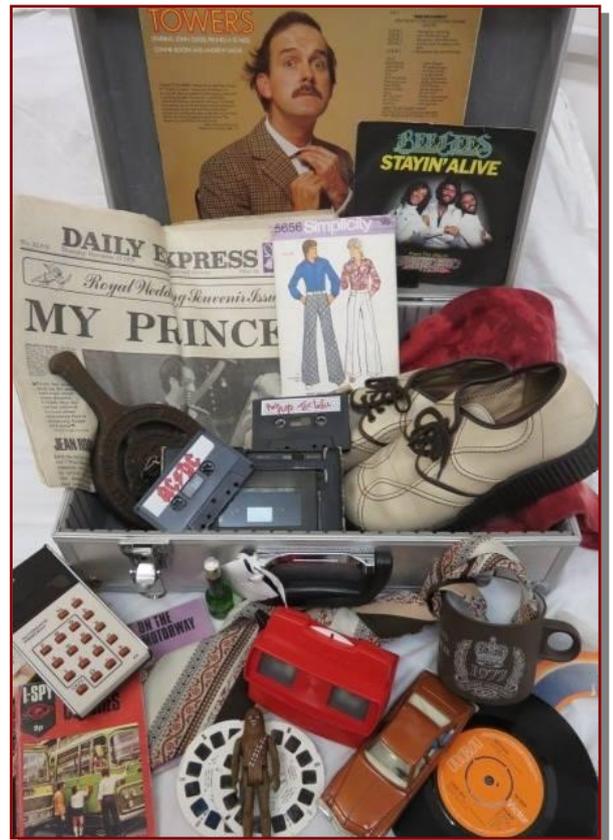
www.medieval-siege-society.co.uk/events

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EDITOR: Pam Gasking
<mailto:office@dacorumheritage.org.uk>
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Authors are responsible for content accuracy.
Deadline: for next issue is 20th May 2016.



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